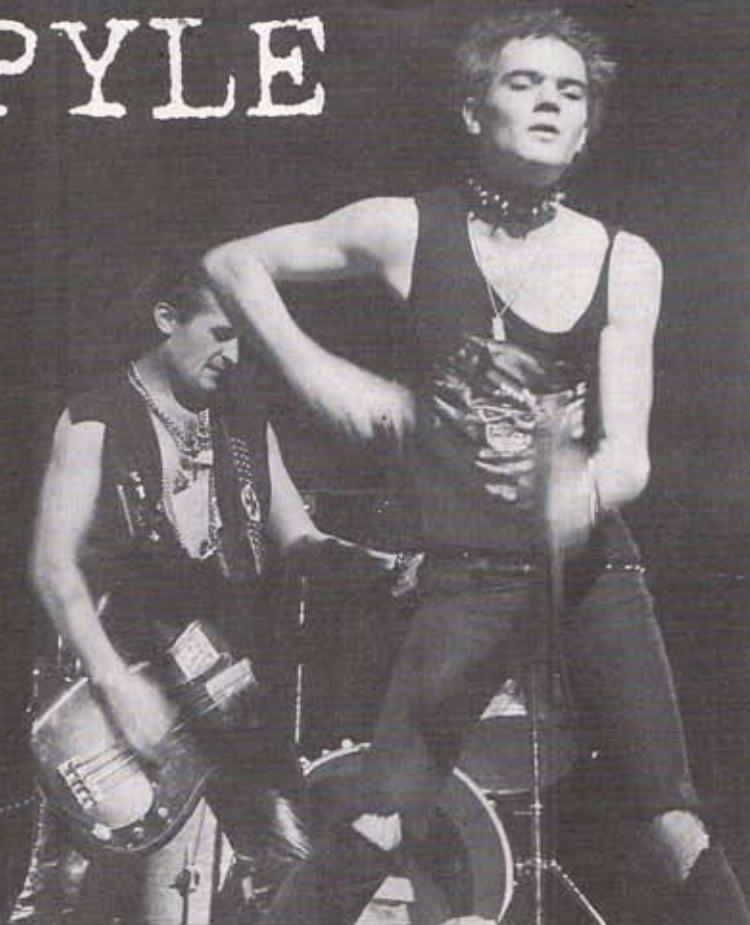


DON PYLE



Don Pyle has been an important part of the Toronto punk scene. He was the singer for a punk band called Crash Kills Five that self-released a single. Don went on to play in Shadowy Men On A Shadowy Planet, which people know from Kids in the Hall. Something that a lot of people don't know about Don is that he was a photographer. He showed an exhibit in 2007 called Trouble in the Camera Club, which led to a book of the same name. The photos are unbelievable and capture a lot of Toronto in the early days of the first wave of the punk scene.

This interview was conducted by Greg Dick on May 13, 2007 for the Equalizing Distort radio show.

MRR: Were you aware of an underground music scene in Toronto before punk?

Well, no because really, going to the Crash 'n' Burn was the first time that I was at a place that was a bar. That was a big thing because we were totally underage. I was lucky that I was a big kid and that I could get away with it. I never got asked for ID. Part of it was that the places that we were going to, like Crash 'n' Burn weren't asking for ID. We didn't have to worry about that. Going to the bars for the first time, you are trying to pass in the world of adults. We were kids entering this adult world that we had never been able to enter before—there's drinking and there's music! We were aware that there was some kind of an underground scene before the Crash 'n' Burn because we would go see bands like Rough Trade or the Dishes, but it wasn't until a bit later that we were able to identify that the things we liked were considered underground.

MRR: What was the first gig that you saw at the Crash 'n' Burn?

The Diodes? No. Actually...it is hard to remember. They seemed to be playing every single time I went there. The Boyfriends were probably the first band I saw there. The Boyfriends and then all I can think of was the Diodes. I've got these pictures implanted in my brain now. I saw the Dents there. They were another great young local band. Their guitarist, Mohamed, was later in Crash Kills Five.

MRR: Was he listed as Mohamed on the Crash Kills Five record?

I think it says Nagdee which is his last name.

MRR: I always liked him. I thought he was a cool guy.

When I first started going to shows, my friend Roger and I would go together, but I was also wary that he wasn't going to get in. He looked younger than me. There were only a couple of other people that were my age or around my age and the Dents were some of those people. This rock'n'roll band that were around sixteen years old and I made friends. I met Mohamed then and ended up playing in a band with him.

MRR: Toronto was quick to embrace the punk scene, which I have often felt that we have never been recognized for. How do you feel about that?

I always thought it was kind of surprising that Toronto didn't get as much attention and part of that is that not a lot of the early bands put out records and also there wasn't media. There was *Shades*, which came out around '78. There were other papers that would come and go for a while. I remember there was something called *Cheap Thrills* for a while, but things were very regional.

MRR: That was a freebie that you would get on the streets. Did you ever get *T.O. Punk*? I think Johnny Garbagecan put that one out.

Yeah. It was like a fanzine. I had a couple of those.

MRR: Then there was the *Crash 'n' Burn* newsletter.

I don't remember seeing those. But the Toronto scene was really about



bands not putting out records. The Ugly only put out one single until that recent compilation CD and that wasn't even the original version of the band that was so great. The Curse had only one 45. So many of these bands had only one 45 and many of them came out after their heyday. Even the Viletones, and they are the premier punk band in Canada. Some people say DOA, I think it's the Viletones, and it is just two 45s from that period. That is it.

MRR: Two damn good 45s though.

But even the second one, they crammed too many songs on it and it sounded really thin. It was a real let down from the power of the first single. The first single is still... you know, you hear it and it's intense. It has the most perfect momentum and build—first bass, then one big guitar chord, long drum roll and into the whole band, pounding one chord. It gives me goose bumps.

MRR: Did you go to the 3D concert with The Doncasters, the Diodes and The Dishes?

No. Didn't go to that one, but I have the poster!

MRR: Yeah, I guess the Diodes would have been the first official punk band to play in Toronto, I think before anybody, I would assume.

I don't know. It's hard to say because I don't know if there can be any defining punk band.

MRR: I mean for a punk band to do a live gig.

I remember at the time that Rough Trade were considered by some to be "punk" and I thought they were so lame. I remember looking at pictures of them and thinking "Wow. Really dark and threatening." They had this sex and leather image and I saw them and it was like risqué piano music.

MRR: Do you remember your first punk gig? Would it have been the Crash 'n' Burn? Using '77 punk as the dividing line. Did you go to the New Yorker shows?

Oh yeah. I saw the Cramps there. I saw the Ramones in '76 at their very first show there. I saw John Cale, The Vibrators. Lewis Furey. Regrettably, I didn't see Wayne County at that time. The New Yorker was primarily an art house movie theatre. Do you remember that Amos Poe film *Blank Generation*? That was the very earliest film in which we could see some of the New York bands. I remember seeing that there. Once I started going to things, I would go all the time. Once I got my first taste of freedom and my mom started letting me stay out past midnight I would just go to as many shows as I could. I went to shows all the time.

MRR: What do you remember of the Shock Theatre and about David's?

It was an old movie theatre. I remember it ran very briefly. It was a dark dirty movie theatre. I remember being very scared when I went to David's.

MRR: It was a pretty creepy place.

It was partly because it was a creepy place and being a little closeted gay boy and going into a gay bar for the first time. Not only was I going into bars for the first time but I went into a gay bar so I got really scared that somehow people would know I was gay because I was in a gay bar. I remember that it was a totally tacky, trashy place.

MRR: It had a bunch of statues in it.

There was a semi-spiral staircase with wrought iron railings when you came in, six or seven steps down to the first level around a statue of David, of course, that I think doubled as a fountain but was dried up. I just remember that it was dark and dirty and the waiter was Mr. Shit who I think became the bass player in the Hate, the band that I was telling you about earlier that had a 45.

MRR: You were saying that they had a 45, so that makes three Toronto punk singles I don't have.

I have a flyer for the single but I don't recall ever seeing the actual record. He was this guy who had ironed-on letters on his shirt that said "Mr. Shit" and that was when I met him. Later, he was part of a circle of friends who I went to gigs with. I went to David's a few times. It was in a back alley and there was a great clothing store right next to it, which at that time was one of the only used-clothing stores in town. That's where you would go to get straight leg jeans or running shoes, like army surplus running shoes—white '60s dress shirts and that kind of thing, so I knew the back alley there. I remember seeing the Ugly doing a New Year's Eve show there. That was the Cardboard Brains, maybe the Swollen Members, Viletones and the Ugly. At the end of the Uglys' set, Mike Nightmare is spinning the mic in the air and throws it into the audience. The mic lands at my feet so I quickly unplug it and put it in my pocket, so this microphone gave me an excuse to be a singer in a band. I used it when I was in Crash Kills Five. It had the word "Nightmare" scratched on it with a pin. I don't know whom I was with at the time, but I had this microphone and thought "they're going to find it so we better go right now". It was New Year's Eve of 1977-78 and the Cramps were playing at the New Yorker Theatre across the road, so we went around the corner and saw the Cramps. The next day we heard that David's burned down so I thought, "Phew, they are never going to know I stole that microphone."

MRR: I can't believe somebody actually stole something from Nightmare. That's a first. You have a photo in your collection of Rojer the girl with another girl, whom I remember but had forgotten about until I saw the photo. Her name was Rabies. Tell me about Rabies and Rojer.

The two of them were sisters and I met Rojer in high school. You would rotate classes and you'd be in a different classroom for different subjects. Someone had written some band name on the desk and then I wrote another band name and I wondered "Who is that? Who would write that band name?" We then started writing notes back and forth to each other; "Who are you" and "Let's meet." And so we arranged to meet through notes on the school desk. We met each other and we started to hang out and became pretty good friends. She lived right around the corner from the school, so at lunch we would sometimes go to her and her sister's (Rabies/Vera) place. They were two young women living with their father. Apparently there was a mother on the scene but I don't remember there ever being a mother around. They both lived with their father and they were both kind of wild girls. Rabies (Vera) started this band called Tyranna.

MRR: So she was the singer of Tyranna. There are some great pictures of them.

She had another band. There were several versions of

Tyranna. I don't even remember if the first one I saw was called Tyranna. In looking through my photos in preparation of the show, I found some photos I have of her and her band playing in a parking lot outside of a municipal office in Scarborough. This is maybe 1977. It's really funny looking at the pictures because every member of the band describes a different subculture. Everything was shifting at the time, at the first moment of punk, where Vera's in a kimono sort of thing and harsh make up, that is sort of glitter but sort of punk, and she has a bass player who has really long hair and looks like he is in Uriah Heep. He ended up being in the second version of the Ugly, after he cut his hair. And the drummer is wearing a sweater and looking like a businessman. I took pictures of my friend's band and then when she started Tyranna, I also took pictures of them. Rojer and I hung out a lot together. We would go to shows together because we lived in the same neighborhood and we would come home on the night bus after the subway had closed. She ended up living with different mutual friends, Virlana, Cram, Reid Diamond. She lived in a place on Parliament Street with different people that we would hang out with before going to gigs or after going to gigs. That Parliament Street apartment was a real social hub for a particular group of people. Rojer was an interesting person, really smart, a really nice person in many ways but very controlled by her constructed image that she had of an indifferent "I don't care about anything" person. She was hard, very deliberately hard and tough.

MRR: She claimed her turf. I remember seeing you at a Diodes gig at the Colonial with a homemade Diodes shirt and you were saying you had a jacket with a Diodes logo on it.

You know, it's funny because I thought about that afterwards and I did have a t-shirt, that I cut out stencil spray painted letters.

MRR: With cut off sleeves?

Maybe. I don't remember that part. My mother taught me how to needlepoint and I had a blue corduroy jacket, so I needle pointed on a piece of denim so that I could change the patch on the back of my jacket, because I only had one jacket.

MRR: I always thought I was the youngest guy at a lot of these gigs and it turns out that you are a year younger than me. Everybody back then was, I think, in their mid-twenties or older.

Yeah, people who were around 22, they didn't want to hang out with a fifteen-year-old so... I went there regularly and I think they were more kind of amused than anything, but ironically enough, through New Rose, I ended up in later musical circumstances because this guy had written to the Viletones from Calgary. I was in New Rose and I told Freddy and Margarita that I was going to be going to Calgary to visit my brother. Freddy said, "Hey, we just got a letter from this guy in Calgary. You should write to him and see if there are any punk bands in Calgary," so he gave me his address. I wrote to him saying, "I am coming to visit. Are there any bands there?" He wrote back saying, "Don't come here. It is awful. I'm leaving here as soon as I can. The only thing vaguely like a punk band is my brother's band." He said, "They are not really a punk band but they play some

cover songs of punk bands and they do some originals and then they do songs by the Babys and Mott the Hoople and stuff like that." He and his brother and I became pen pals and when I went to Calgary I met them. So the guy that I was writing with was Steve Koch, who eventually moved to Toronto, and the band was his brother Alex Koch, Reid Diamond, Brian Connelly and another guy named Scott. They were called Buick Mackane. Steve and I immediately started a band when he came here, with Mohamed from the Dents playing drums and a guy named Boring Bill on bass. We did one show, at a gig in a Quonset hut called "Milton Madness," put on by the Milton band the Sophisticatos, and the Viletones saw him play and poached him from our almost non-existent band. Steve was in the Viletones and later in the Demics and many other bands. Reid, Brian and Alex came out to Toronto six or eight months later, leaving their singer behind. They wanted to lose their singer so they moved to Toronto without telling him that they were moving here. They got a rehearsal space and started rehearsing. They were basically living in my mother's basement at first. When they were rehearsing, I was the only person in town that they knew besides Steve, so I was hanging out with them. They asked "Do you want to sing while we look for a singer?" and I said "Sure." Soon they asked me to join the band, so that is how I ended up being in Crash Kills Five. Reid Diamond and Brian Connelly are also the guys I ended up being in Shadowy Men with. So, because of Steve Koch writing to New Rose, writing a letter to the Viletones, I ended up being in a band.

MRR: You guys did a great version of "Henry the VIII." Did you guys do any other covers?

We did "To Sir with Love" briefly and "Little Willy" by the Sweet.

MRR: I remember "Little Willy." That was great. Did you guys play out of town at all besides Milton?

A little bit. Crash Kills Five played London. The Demics took us under their wing for a little while. We were renting the basement of the house they lived in on Baldwin Street for a rehearsal space and we did a bunch of shows supporting them, so we ended up going to London a fair bit. But we didn't really travel around too much. I don't even remember other cities. We went to Montreal and Ottawa. Those seemed to be really far to us at the time.

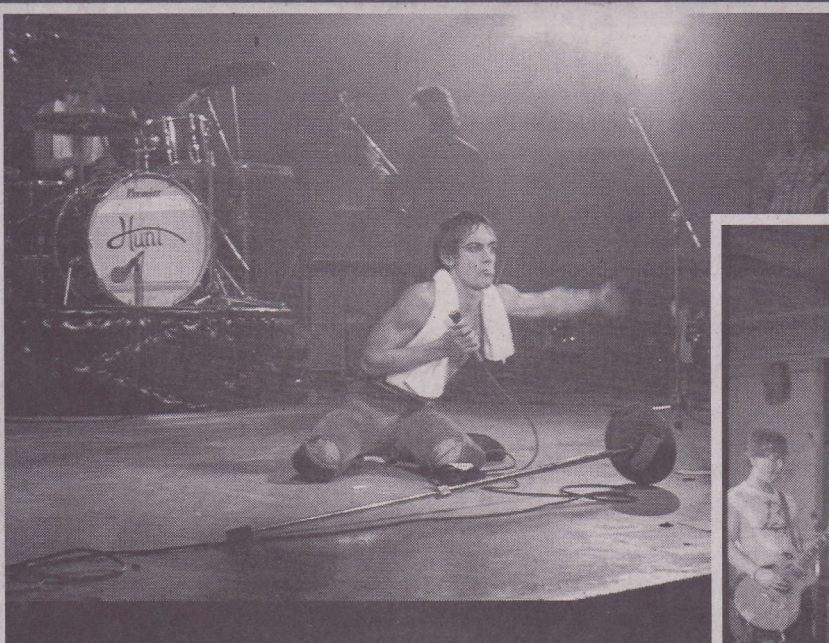
MRR: You released your record in '80. I am assuming you recorded it in '79? Where did you record it?

We recorded it in a garage on Bedford Road, which is still there and I pass it on the bus all the time. It is a totally posh neighborhood now, but at that time some of it was big, rundown mansions. It is hard to believe that Bedford Road was once a slum.

MRR: Well that would have been right behind the Turning Point. How did you finance it because records were pretty hard to put out back then?

We all had jobs so it was from that and gigs probably. It is funny because the guy who recorded that in his garage was Gerry Fielding. We ended up meeting years later in Shadowy Men because he was the audio tech on the *Kids in the Hall* that we did music for. It was very funny to cross paths with him in that way again.





Diodes, Crash'n'Burn, 1977 Crash'n'Burn, 1977



Iggy Pop, Masonic Temple, Lust for Life tour, 1977

EVERYTHING WAS SHIFTING AT THE TIME

MRR: It's a great single. How many were pressed, what label was it on and could you find it outside Toronto?

A thousand. That was the minimum order back in those days. We just put it out ourselves. You could probably get it in London, Ontario.

MRR: Does anyone have a box of them still?

Now that I think of it, Reid had a job and Reid paid for the record so he ended up with all the remaining copies. He put them in kids' bags for Halloween one year.

MRR: Lucky kids. Are there any unreleased recordings from Crash Kills Five that might see the light of day?

No. They will probably never see the light of day. We went into another studio once to start working on some kind of other record and it was a horrible experience. It was really bad. Bad in many ways, you know. I was never a great singer and I think when I heard myself on tape for the first time ...

MRR: You have a very melodic voice. I think you sang great.

Well, that is very nice of you to say but Crash Kills Five...when they came to Toronto, they already had these songs, so when I think of my own musical path, it is something that I often forget about. Even though it was a great experience I didn't have the emotional attachment to some of the songs because I was singing songs that other people had written. I didn't have the same emotional investment in them. Brian Connelly, who was in Crash Kills Five to begin with and who was in Shadowy Men later, is an amazing guitar player. All three of the guys in Crash Kills

Five were great musicians. I totally felt out of my element in that band because I was not yet aware enough to take control of what I was doing. It was only later that I started writing lyrics and started writing songs, but Crash Kills Five songs were mostly Reid's songs. Reid wrote a lot of stuff in that band. After Brian left the band Mohamed played with us. Again, a wonderful guy, but not the amazing guitar player that Brian Connelly was; so these songs that we knew in one way became something different and it felt less than what it had been before. The band started to be less exciting to me.

MRR: Well, I personally think that being on edge and not sure about your vocal ability probably kept you on your toes. As a teenager you purchased a 35 mm camera and right now you have this amazing collection of photos documenting the scene from 1976-1978. I have seen a lot of collections of work from this time and I have to say that yours is the finest yet. When you were taking these photos were you taking them as a music fan or were you taking them with the mind that eventually these would be a collection of photos?

No, it was completely because I was a music fan. For me, the 45 is the most perfect thing. I love 45s. I love how small they are. I love how contained they are. Anything that you are going to hear on a 45 is going to have more of an impact than an album track because it is on its own. I have always loved the object, unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know which. I have always loved the object. It has always been as equally important to me as the music. MP3s, I have a detachment from. Like everybody, I don't place a value on them because they are just digital

files. They don't contain a tangible experience that is unique to them. Taking photos was a way of taking something tangible home with me from these shows. It was helping me create the memory. I just wanted to have pictures. If I think about how closely I looked at the photos in *Rock Scene*, it's not surprising that I wanted a similar record of the bands I was seeing. Part of it was my age, being in the front but needing to be invisible too. I had insecurity about how I looked because of my glasses, so it was a way for me to maintain a distance. Be in there, you know, but also be removed from it.

MRR: Yeah. You looked like you were up pretty close for some of those shots.
Well, I was. I didn't have a zoom lens.

MRR: There are a lot of shows that were really important. The shots of Iggy at the Masonic Temple, where it was all folding chairs that night but everybody kind of sat in front of Iggy. There was like a ten foot barrier and these people were sitting politely watching this guy go nuts on stage with the Ramones opening for him. There was the Runaways at the el Mocambo. You have great shots of those. Blondie played the el Mocambo and the B-Girls got up and did the encore and did a Shangri-Las song. What inspired you to put this exhibit together at this time?

Over the past couple of years people have been asking me for different pictures of particular bands. "Oh, don't you have a picture of that thing?" It was Sam's 50th birthday (from the Uglys) and Steve Koch got in touch with me. "Don't you have some good pictures of them?" I couldn't find them in time for his birthday and

Stiv Bators, Cheetah Chrome, DEAD BOYS,
Crash'n'Burn, 1977



Ramones, RPM Toronto, 1987

AT THE FIRST MOMENT OF PUNK

then something else came up, but part of it was moving. I've got to get rid of stuff and I have crates of photographs, like those plastic totes. It was really a bunch of things that led to it, but a lot of it had to do with technology and how there is now the technology to scan the negatives. I was developing them myself at the time and so some things were hung up to dry in the school dark room, so they would be all dusty.

MRR: That is great. I didn't realize you had that much of a hands-on approach.

Oh yeah, I developed almost all of these pictures. We had old enlargers at school, so I had negatives that were scratched by these old enlargers with sharp edges on the frame holders. It was a bunch of things. With the technology now, I can scan the negatives and re-touch them and remove the dust and scratches and see what they were. I did music for an installation that opened a few years ago, as part of Contact Festival and it was really the

Contact Festival that made me think that I've got all these pictures that I have been carrying around in this box. I look at them every once in a while and I've got all these negatives that I have never really seen and I would love to see what is on them. So when I scanned them I realized "Wow. There is so much stuff here that I have never seen before." I only printed certain things that I've recently scanned. At the time, out of thirty-six frames I might have printed two or three pictures. I couldn't afford to do much else. Seeing the things I had made me realize that I have a show here and it's a shame for me to leave these sitting in a box because I know there are other people who would like to see them.

MRR: Absolutely not. It is an incredible collection. There was a great turn out at the Beaver for the opening gala of your collection, some of the people you took photos of were there too. What kind of reaction did you get from people?

It was a total love-in. There were

so many people who hadn't seen each other for years and they were all really happy to see each other. That was the best thing about it. It was good to see a lot of people that I hadn't seen in a long time, people that have moved away or I lost touch with. There were also some people who came who were pictured in the photographs, some people from bands and some people that were just friends that I took photographs of. My friend Carmelina who was known as Cram, she came from Kingston. There was a photograph of her in the show. And Roger Logan who was wearing the Ramones shirt.

MRR: Dave Quinton from the Mods.

Yeah, Dave Quinton, Sam Ferrara. I think for a lot of people it's just disbelief looking at themselves. For me it's disbelief partly because there are so many people pictured who have died. That was emotional for me. There are times for me when something happens that really makes me feel how precious and short life is. And looking at pictures that are thirty years old,

of these people when they are young and beautiful and doing something really amazing and exciting, looking as carefree as they were at the time, and then seeing them for real now, next to the photograph, it's amazing. It was really emotional to see people now that have survived this. The people that are still alive and that are doing great. There was something else that I was just thinking about. Part of the thing is that we are looking at it now, so now, as far as we know is the last page of our life story. We only know up until now. And we are looking at these things from the past and it is almost like we are looking at page one. Or maybe page three.

MRR: A lot of us had just met around then, so in a sense it could be page one.

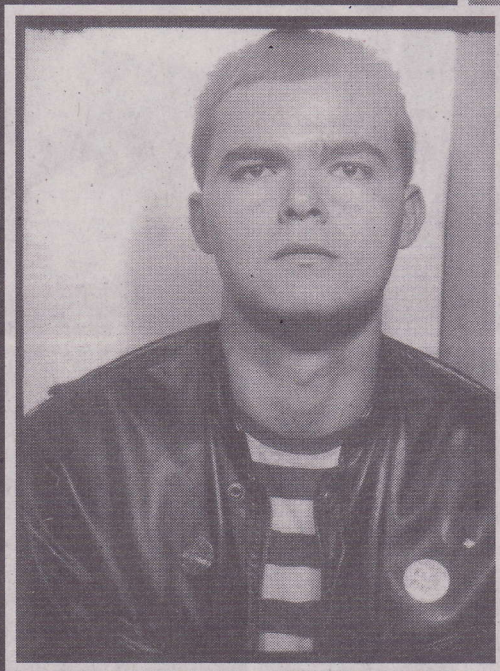
A lot of people were at the age where they were just forming their own self-identity. I am looking at it now and I know how the whole story went. That part is really amazing.

MRR: Will you show your work in other cities?

I don't really know if this would really translate outside of the city because there are so many Toronto bands in it.

Greg worked with Don to find a publisher and by May 1, 2011 a book called Trouble in the Camera Club, published by ECW Press in Toronto, will be out.

Check out www.donpyle.com or www.troubleinthecameraclub.com for details.



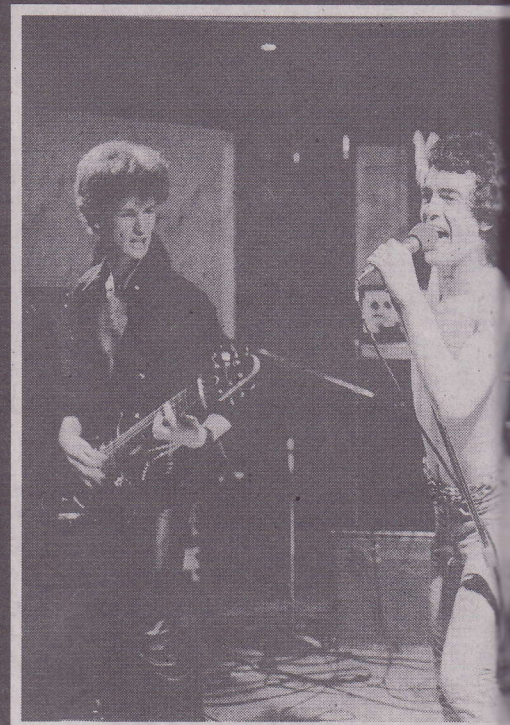
Self-portrait, 1978



D.O.A., Chuck Biscuits, The Edge, 1978

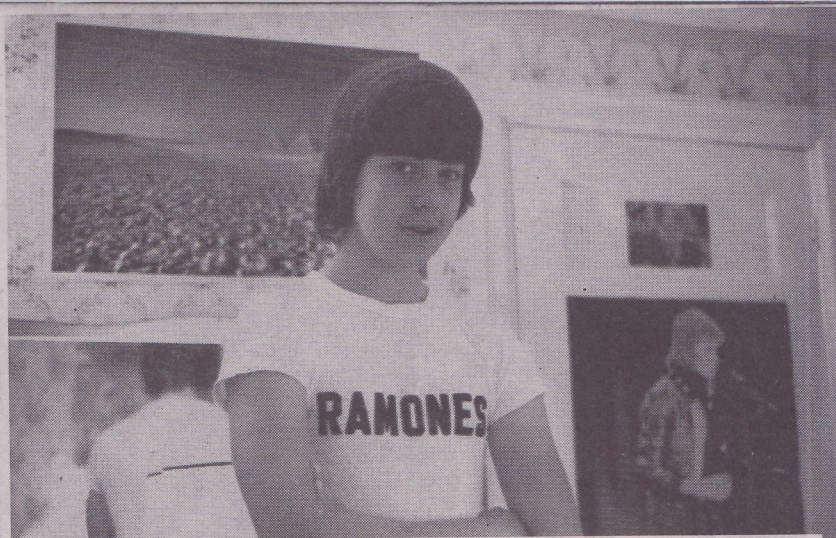


Frankie Venom, TEENAGE HEAD, Horseshoe tavern, 1978

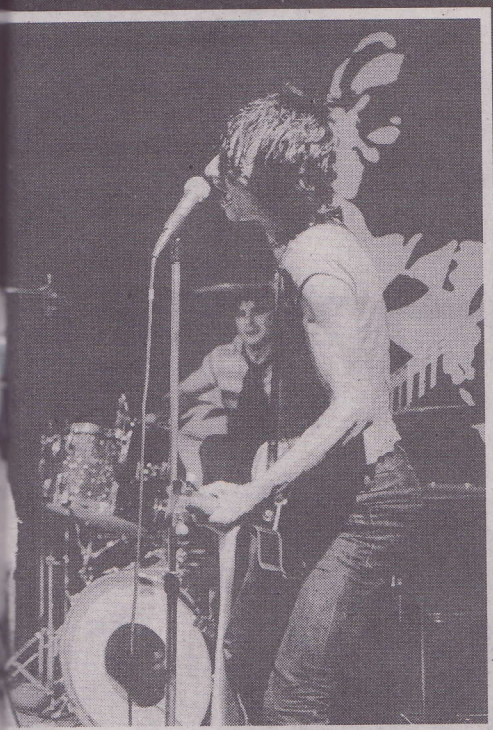


The Ugly, Turning Point 1977.

Roger in his room, 1977



Mohammed, Mohammed Nagdee, aka Eddy Dent, The Dents/Crash Kills Five, NYC, 1980 NYC



Right: Vera Skye, aka Rabies (singer in Tyranna) & her sister Rojer, Horseshoe Tavern, 1978

